

To: CIA  
From: INR

STUART

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DRAFT MEMORANDUM

received  
2 Apr 71

25X1A

TO

[Redacted]

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FROM

[Redacted]

SUBJECT: Proposed Release to Kennedy Sub-Committee Staff of  
Summary of USIS/Laos Survey - ACTION MEMORANDUM

In February we obtained Ambassador Godley's approval to release a summary of the July 1970 USIS Plain of Jars Refugee Survey. He agreed that this was the least disadvantageous means of meeting previously received telephonic inquiries (to USIA and AID) from the Refugee Sub-Committee staff for copies of the survey. In conversations with Sub-Committee staff, both USIA and AID had indicated that the subject survey was an informal, internal mission document only, undertaken without sanction of the RLG, and that we would therefore be reluctant to release it but would look into other possible means of getting the information to the Sub-Committee.

We have not up to now released a summary of the Survey to the Sub-Committee because we felt that even a cleaned-up summary of the Survey still held considerable potential for being used against us by those who were trying to prove a case against on-going air operations. Also, there was the fact that the Sub-Committee had not evinced any further interest in obtaining the Survey.

However, as you know, we have now received word that the Sub-Committee intends to reopen hearings on refugees and we feel it is most likely that interest in the USIS Survey will be renewed.

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State Dept. declassification & release instructions on file

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In view of this and for other reasons discussed below, I think that we should now consider releasing the attached summary to the Sub-Committee under cover of a letter from the desk, a copy of which is also attached. We believe the matter will certainly arise to plague one or more of State's witnesses in the forthcoming hearings if we do not -- and this action would avoid the charge that the Department had withheld information which the Sub-Committee might argue it has a right to know. We would ask, however, that the summary not be made public.

We have reason to believe that the Sub-Committee staff has made considerable use of ex-IVS'er Fred Bransman who has remained in Laos gathering material on refugees for his various publishing enterprises until he was recently kicked out by the RLG. (We understand from Nick Veliotis that Bransman has been in town for several weeks speaking to various legislative assistants on the Hill on his favorite topic -- bombing -- and we assume he has been in close touch with Sub-Committee staffers such as Jerry Tinker and Dale DeHaan) The attached article in the Far Eastern Economic Review provides a sample of his views drawn from his own survey of refugees. While the attached Summary, we believe, contains numerous points that could be made against us, it does put the potentially damaging statements in the Bransman article and others of its ilk back into the proper perspective: e.g. his claim that "every refugee stated that his village was destroyed by bombing" versus the Summary's statement that "75% [of respondents] said their homes had been damaged by bombing"

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and "99% [who] said bombing made life difficult for them". Also, Branfman's line excludes any mention of the Pathet Lao as targets of the bombing whereas the Summary makes specific mention of the bombing's purpose: "74% understood the bombing was caused by the Pathet Lao's waging war".

Recommendation:

That you approve release of the attached summary of the USIS Survey to the Sub-Committee.

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le:  
From: INR-STUART**SECRET**DRAFT LETTER

Mr. Jerry Tinker  
Senate Judiciary Sub-Committee on Refugees  
New Senate Office Building  
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Tinker:

In accordance with your request, I send you the enclosed information on the responses given by refugees from the Plain of Jars to an informal inquiry made among them in the summer of 1970. The principal subjects covered were the refugees' social background, their conditions of life in the zone of Laos which is controlled by the Lao Patriotic Front and the North Vietnamese Army and subject to bombing by the Royal Lao Government and the United States, and their reasons for leaving that zone.

As you are already aware, this material was prepared for the internal use of the U.S. Mission in Vientiane. Neither the survey, nor this document's release has been cleared with the Royal Lao Government which would probably take exception to its publication or widespread dissemination. I would therefore request that the Sub-Committee take appropriate precautions in its use of this document to prevent any possible embarrassment to the U. S. Government.

Sincerely yours,

Frank N. Burnet  
Country Officer for Laos

Enclosure:

Summary of Refugee Survey

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**SECRET**SURVEY OF REFUGEES FROM THE PLAIN OF JARS -- SUMMARY

In late June and early July of 1970, USIS/Vientiane American and local staff under the guidance of the Embassy Political Section conducted interviews with about 215 refugees from the Plain of Jars area of Laos on the conditions of life in the wartime Pathet Lao zone and their reasons for leaving it. (The results of an earlier survey on Plain of Jars refugees (March 1970) and a July survey of non-Plain of Jars refugees are not included in the material presented below. Both were less complete, detailed and conclusive than the survey whose results presented; their only substantial difference was their indication of higher levels of antipathy to the Pathet Lao.) The refugees were then living in twenty settlements in the Vientiane valley. Physical obstacles such as bad weather and bad roads limited the scope of the interviewer's findings. Elaborate statistical sampling methods were not applied to the selection of interviewees, who nonetheless seem fairly typically distributed and generally representative of the population of their area in age, sex, education, occupation, and villages of origin. By comparison to the general group of refugees, those people had lived with the Pathet Lao longer than the average time. In comparison to the general population of the Pathet Lao zone, ethnic Lao, as opposed to hill peoples, predominate untypically in the Plain of Jars population.

Respondents' Background

The great majority of the respondents left their homes

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1969, and more than 80% said they had moved one or more times before their move from the Plain of Jars to Vientiane province. Seventy-seven percent said their children were with them; 20% said their children were with the Pathet Lao. Many had had children in Pathet Lao schools; the parents appreciated the schools when they were local (three quarters of the cases), but disliked it if the children were required to leave home for schooling.

#### Reaction to Life with the Pathet Lao

"Unity" (cooperative farming and communal arrangements for looking after children) (21%) and "morality" (17%) were positive aspects of the refugees' experience with the Pathet Lao; forced portage (40%) (which 65% of the respondents had performed) and taxation (35%) were the negative aspects most frequently mentioned.

#### Bombing

97% of the people said that they had seen a bombing attack. About one third had seen bombing as early as 1964, and a great majority had seen attacks frequently or many times.

The Pathet Lao, 75% of the refugees responded, had taught them to dig bunkers to avoid bombing attacks. When bombs dropped, all the villagers reported taking refuge either in a bunker inside the village (28%), in a bunker outside the village (41%), or in the woods (31%). Somewhat fewer than two-thirds of those who answered this question had seen someone killed. Usually a small number of deaths had been observed; 32% had seen only one person killed by a bomb. This applied to troops as well. Only

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18% of the respondents had actually seen Lao/Viet troops killed by bombing, and 25% had heard rumors of such deaths. Isolated atypical answers to those questions were also received; one man said he had seen 112 persons killed, other individuals spoke of strikes that had killed 80, 20, 30 and 20 Pathet Lao troops respectively.)

75% said their homes had been damaged by bombing. Most of these attacks took place in 1969. 99% of the people said bombing made life difficult for them; two-thirds holding that it made earning more than a bare subsistence living impossible in its intense periods. 88% said they had built a shelter in the woods. 71% of those questioned said that United States aircraft did the bombing; 17% said it was the RLG. But 74% of the people said they understood that the air-attacks were caused basically by the Pathet Lao's waging war. 23% said bombing was directed at the people as well as the Pathet Lao. 13% said that it was aimed at the people only. 6% said the Pathet Lao had stored ammunition in their villages, while 11% had heard of this practice in other villages. Respondents divided evenly, in saying that Pathet Lao troops were present or not present in the area of bombing. The refugees knew aircraft names (F-104, Skyraiders, T-28, F-4) and were remarkably articulate about types of aircraft.

#### Reasons for Moving to the RLG Zone

49% of the 226 who were asked the question said that fear of bombing was the reason they had sought refuge by moving away from home; 29% gave dislike of the Pathet Lao as the reason for

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leaving their home areas, while 15% said the arrival of the RLG, and its allowing or encouraging them to move was the primary factor in deciding to leave. 57% said they would return to their villages if bombing stopped, but this seemed associated in their minds with a complete end to the war and the disappearance of the Pathet Lao. 96% said they would not return if the Pathet Lao were still in control of their homes.

**Conclusions**

The USIS officer who directed the interview concluded that it was the combination of three factors; the bombing, the portage, and the lack of restrictions imposed on those living with the RLG, which determined the refugees' decisions to move from the Pathet Lao Zone to the Government area of Laos.

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LAOS

## The Victims

BY FRED BRANFMAN

Vientiane: Officially, American bombing in Laos and Cambodia is limited to "air support for troops in combat" or "enemy-troop concentrations or structures". Over a thousand interviews with refugees from communist zones, however, contradict this. Every refugee has stated that his village was destroyed by bombing while he still inhabited it. In almost all cases refugees report there was no ground fighting, and communist soldiers were dug into mountains or roamed the forest some distance from their village.

The American embassy here estimates that over a million civilians inhabit the mountainous two-thirds of Laos controlled by the Pathet Lao. The past year has brought more than 30,000 of them into the Mekong Valley, and their reports have given outsiders the first clear picture of the life under bombing now being led by the hundreds of thousands of villagers left behind.

The refugees say that from 1964 until 1967, bombing of villages was relatively sporadic and mostly conducted by Lao and American propeller aircraft. But in 1968 regular bombing of villages began, largely by American jets, and most were evacuated. Raids increased considerably after November 1968, when jets were diverted into Laos after the bombing halt over North Vietnam. In 1969, according to the refugees, the situation became even worse, with bombing attacks occurring as often as five or six times on a given day. As an old man put it, "the planes came like the birds, and the bombs fell like the rain."

During 1967 and 1968 most moved into the forest in the vicinity of their villages. They constructed small bamboo shelters near caves, trenches dug into hills, or holes camouflaged by sticks and leaves. Many stayed in their living-places for months on end. Others would live in their shelters, running for a trench, cave or hole at the sound of an aircraft. It took four people about a month to dig a trench or hole suitable for a family. Most households report that they dug several such hideaways during the course of the heavy bombing.

"We would try to find places where we thought the planes wouldn't bomb," a 62-year-old woman from the Plain of Jars explained, "but in the end they bombed everywhere."

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This holy cow just eats up bull.

heavy casualties - often as high as 25% in villages surveyed. Most civilians were killed or wounded by anti-personnel bombs, though victims of 500-pound bombs, napalm, fragmentation bombs and strafing have also appeared in refugee camps. The villagers had to leave their retreats regularly to raise food, care for livestock, pound rice, and perform other such essential tasks. Many casualties occurred during these occasions.

Older people and children form an unusually high percentage of the victims. This was because the children were the most likely to become afraid and fail to find shelter during a raid. Older people "could not run fast enough" or did not react quickly due to the disabilities of age.

Education, commerce, religious observance and agricultural production were severely curtailed. Even before 1969 schools, markets, co-operative stores and pagodas had to be relocated in the forest. Heavier bombing after that made regular groupings of people almost impossible.

Fear of being seen from the air also restricted farming activities. By 1969 villages had abandoned most of their ricefields, turning to cultivation of maize in the forest and subsistence plots of rice. They worked on their fields mainly at night, with the aid of small kerosene lamps. Battered rice lying out in the open was a particular target.

One of the greatest hardships was the long and often hazardous portage of ammunition and rice for the Pathet Lao. Before the high-altitude bombers began to fly, the guerrillas had to haul their logistics itself. But as patrols grew in

intensity, villagers were called upon to carry supplies for several months a year.

Livestock posed a particular problem. Many cows and buffaloes were killed by bombs or by ingesting grass or water poisoned by defoliants.

The danger of lighting fires is also often mentioned. Smoko by day or fire-light at night tended to attract the bombers. People were often afraid to cook, and found it difficult to bear the cold during the freezing dry-season nights. The material damage was considerable.

The bombing had little effect on the Pathet Lao army, refugees say. Communist guerrillas could move through the forest in small groups, avoiding the villages. They were adept at digging in and fighting out where aircraft were likely to strike. Interviews with about 100 Pathet Lao defectors tend to confirm this; one former company commander said: "The planes could rarely locate us. If they did, they could not come too low or we might shoot them down. If they stayed high, they could not hit us."

Refugee reports are supported by such eyewitness accounts as those of Jacques Decomoy, Le Monde correspondent, who visited the Pathet Lao stronghold of Sam Neua province in the spring of 1968; US Senate studies issued by the Kennedy subcommittee on refugees and a paper prepared by a UN expert here.

The refugees interviewed are in some ways relatively fortunate -- they are out of the firing line. Life under the bombs continues for hundreds of thousands of Laotians whose minimal wish, one can

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## ROUTING AND RECORD SHEET

SUBJECT: (Optional)

FROM:

[Redacted]

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EXTENSION

NO.

OLC 71-0287

DATE

TO: (Officer designation, room number, and building)

DATE

OFFICER'S INITIALS

RECEIVED FORWARDER

COMMENTS (Number each comment to show from whom to whom. Draw a line across column after each comment.)

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*[Handwritten signatures and initials]*

The attached was LDX'ed to this office from State on 2 April 1971. You will note it requires no action on our part. The action within the document is for Ambassador Sullivan to approve the release of a statement concerning refugees in Laos to the Kennedy Sub-Committee staff. As you know, this matter has been under review by the Kennedy Sub-Committee staff and the GAO over the past year, and the Kennedy concern over AID medical support to CIA supported paramilitary forces and their families stems from these inquiries.

The attached is forwarded to keep you advised of a survey which may in the future be of some concern to us.

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Copy also sent OGC

*file Ser Judiciary  
Kennedy Sub-Com.*

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